

22 November 1986

CONGRESS UNIMPRESSED BY CASEY BRIEFING, NEW QUESTIONS RAISED

J By Sue Baker
Washington

A CIA Director William Casey has given some new details to Congress of secret U.S. arms deals with Iran, but he appears only to have widened the controversy.

P "There are more questions than there are answers," Senator Patrick Leahy, ranking Democrat on the Senate intelligence committee, told reporters after one meeting yesterday.

Casey's closed-door briefings to the House and Senate intelligence committees were the first the administration has given to Congress since revelations more than two weeks ago of secret U.S. arms shipments to Iran that involved the release of some American hostages held in Lebanon.

Legislators briefed by Casey said it appeared that more people and more weapons had been involved in the secret dealings with Iran than were previously acknowledged.

President Reagan has denied consistently that arms were traded for the freedom of hostages and has insisted that the policy, kept secret for some 18 months, was proper and lawful.

But several legislators, while declining to give specifics, said they had heard nothing from Casey to change their previous positions that the White House had violated U.S. laws, including a requirement to report to Congress on covert actions in a timely fashion.

Casey, caught between hearings by reporters and asked if he had violated the law, replied, "No, no, no."

House Democratic leader Jim Wright said it appeared several other countries were involved in the shipment of arms to Iran and greater quantities of weapons may have been sent than the amount President Reagan has described as miniscule.

"It is clear other shipments ... of weapons and goods have gone to Iran," said Wright, a Texan who is to replace retiring Thomas O'Neill as Speaker of the House. "I'm not sure I know the totality of it."

Wright said on Thursday he had been told by the White House that 2,008 TOW anti-tank missiles and 235 battery assemblies for HAWK anti-aircraft missiles had been supplied.

Yesterday he gave a first public estimate of the value of that shipment, saying Iran paid \$12 million for the arms.

Wright named Israel as one country involved in sending arms to Iran but declined to name any others.

"We have heard about people who are citizens of other countries or residents of other countries who were involved in arms shipments with the condoning of the United States and the complicity of the United States in some instances," he said.

Continued

details, there were still many unanswered questions about the Iran operation and Congress planned to get to the bottom of the affair.

"I would characterize our meetings (with Casey) as the beginning of a process of determining what the facts are regarding the administration's involvement with Iran," Sen. David Durenberger said.

The House Foreign Affairs committee announced yesterday it planned to hold a series of hearings next month on Iran.

Durenberger, a Minnesota Republican and head of the Senate intelligence panel, said it had become clear the operation was so secretive that not even the president had all the facts.

"I don't know that there is any one person, including the president, who knows all the details," he said. "My only surprise today was that nobody has all the facts."

Reagan said he launched his Iran initiative to improve longterm relations with the strategically-placed nation, to try and end the six-year Iran-Iraq war, to dissuade Iran from the pursuit of terrorism and to secure the release of five Americans kidnapped in Lebanon.

The United States broke relations and slapped an arms embargo on Iran after the 1979-81 hostage crisis when 52 Americans were held for 444 days in Tehran.

The new details of the Iranian affair emerged as Reagan administration officials appeared to differ in their accounts of what many legislators and commentators are calling the president's worst foreign policy blunder.

There were also consistent reports that one or more of Reagan's advisors may be fired, or resign, over the affair.

Secretary of State George Shultz yesterday flatly denied a Los Angeles Times report that he and Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Adm. William Crowe had urged Reagan to fire his National Security adviser, John Poindexter, one of the architects of the Iranian initiative.

White House spokesman Larry Speakes, asked if Poindexter were quitting, told reporters, "I haven't heard him say so." but some administration officials said yesterday they would not be surprised if he were to resign in the near future.

Former White House National Security Adviser Robert "Bud" McFarlane, who went to Iran to make the controversial contacts, said Thursday night he had informed Shultz fully of all developments.

Shultz has said he was kept in the dark over the plan and widely-circulated reports have said he threatened to resign in protest.

McFarlane also enraged White House officials with a statement that he believed sending arms to Iran had been a "mistake" -- an apparent reversal of his previous position.

The Washington Post quoted sources as saying White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan exploded at a meeting, "Let's not forget whose idea this was. It was Bud's idea. When you give lousy advice, you get lousy results."

But Leahy, of Vermont, told reporters yesterday, "It looks to me like an awful lot of people are running around trying to cover their backsides."